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Tapol rejects the findings of Suharto's inquiry commission

The national commission set upby President Suharto to investigate the Santa Cruz Massacre on 12 Novembernas completely exonerated the government and the armed forces in Jakarta and i East Timor of all responsibility for the killings. It accuses the demonstrators of being "savage, emotional and destructive" and blames the East Timorese armedesistance for "provocation and incitement of the youth".

The report of the commission, published in Jakarta today, contradicts the testimony of a video shot while the massare was in progress, which shows the soldiers acting under the command of an officer who has been identified as the intelligence assistant of the Dili military command; it contradicts all the testimonies circulated widely by foreign eyewitnesses as well as testimonies from Timorese who were present at the demonstration. It aims that a number of soldiers, acting under no command and faced with acts om the masses "which could endanger their weapons and their lives", reacted"spontaneously, in self defence".

The Santa Cruz Massacre occurid when dozens of troops opened fire on East Timorese taking part in a peaceful procession to mourn the death two weeks earlier of an East Timorese activist, Sebastiao Gomes, killed when Indonesian troops attacked a church where heras taking refuge. Independent sources believe that the death toll at Santa Cruz emetery was 180 persons.

In an attempt to defuse condemnation by foreign governments and to avoid economic sanctions which could hreaten the country's aid from many western governments, the commission nw distances itself from the totally discredited death toll of 19 upheld by the arm1 forces leadership. The commission says that "while this figure still stands, it ha reason to believe that the number of dead is around 50". It does not explainwhy it chose this figure. Indeed, when the commission returned from Dili la: week, the chairman told the press they had found no evidence that more than19 persons had died.

TAPOL condemns the KPN Repc as a political move by President Suharto to limit the damage already inflicti on his regime by the well-documented revelations about the Massacre. he Report will do nothing to satisfy the East Timorese people, neither those hudreds of families whose relatives have died or disappeared, who were injured oremain unaccounted for, nor the people as a whole who have suffered greatly ienisified repression and control by the forces of occupation since the Massacr occurred. Signalling their total rejection of Suharto's commission, the people efused to have anything to do with it, least of all to testify to its members. Thecommission itself admits that its work was

TL 4884

"obstructed" by the refusal of witnesses to testify.

The situation in East Timor is critical. Reports from Dili today say that yesterday's Christmas festivities were overshadowed by fear. At Midnight Masses at the two churches in Dili were poorly attended by Timorese as plain-clothed army agents were on guard inside and outside these places of worship. Priests continue to be harassed and are under close scrutiny. Father Abel Ricardo, the priest of Motael Church, Dili and Vicar-General of the Diocese of Dili, has been repeatedly interrogated by the security forces for the past month.

TAPOL calls on the British Government, the European Community and governments around the world to press immediately for a UN mission to visit East Timor without delay, not only to undertake a full and impartial investigation into the Massacre but also to provide much-needed protection to the people of occupied East Timor, in preparation for concrete moves to initiate peace talks without pre-conditions, under UN auspices.

The Santa Cruz Massacre is not an isolated event it is only the latest in a long history of mass slaughter inflicted on the East Timorese people since their country was invaded by Indonesia in December 1975. Since then, an estimated 200,000 people have lost their lives, nearly a third of the population. East Timor will never be free from repression and fear until the forces of occupation withdraw and the people can express their wishes in a referendum held under UN supervision.